APPROPRIATING APPROPRIATION: JOHN VIII PALAEOLOGUS IN PRE-MODERN ART AND MODERN ART HISTORY

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When the Byzantine emperor John VIII (r. 1425-48) came to Italy in 1438, he apparently made nothing less than a fashion splash. Within three decades his pointed beard, curly hair, and peaked cap adorned not only portraits of him by Pisanello, Filarete, and an anonymous Tuscan sculptor, but also images of a bystander in an Umbrian painting of St. Bernardino's miracles, a magus in Benozzo Gozzoli's *Adoration*, Pontius Pilate in Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation*, Constantine and Heraclius in Piero's *Legend of the True Cross*, and Mohammed II in a Florentine engraving of the sultan.[1] Indeed, John's features seem to have been considered appropriate for any Eastern figure, be it the villain who washed his hands of Christ's fate or the founder of the Byzantine church, be it the penultimate ruler of a Christian empire or its Muslim conqueror.[2]

Of course, some of those allusions may have sprung from cross-cultural confusion. For example, in copying Pisanello's medal of John, the Florentine engraver of Mohammed II probably could not read the Greek inscription on the obverse and may not have realized he was borrowing a likeness of "John, King and Emperor of the Romans, the Palaeologus."[3] But not every quattrocento image of John can be so easily attributed to a misunderstanding. In some instances the contexts of a likeness imply that the artist appropriated it to fulfill a particular political, religious, or artistic agenda. Indeed, as we shall see, one scholar claims that the substitution of John's features for those of Mohammed may have been compatible with the sultan's defeat of Byzantium and thus contributed to an essential subtext of the image. That is to say, even this ostensible error may actually represent one of the ways in which the Palaeologus and the cultures associated with him were perceived in pre-modern Italy.

At the very least, it joins the other quattrocento depictions of John in a highly revealing index of how modern scholars have treated the "East," in eliciting responses that may, in turn, shed light on the spirit in which these images were created. Since the mid-sixteenth century, Western writers

have often addressed earlier, pre-modern likenesses of John in such a manner as to reveal prejudices towards him and towards the cultures he represents. Some of the biases seem to spring largely from the critics' own circumstances, but many of the prejudices may reflect biases in the images themselves. Though the responses of viewers obviously cannot be equated with the function of an image, much less an artist's intentions, some of the interpretations participate in traditions of response so widespread, or long-established, or both, that they at least suggest the likenesses of John were shaped by mindsets much like those of the critics. That is to say, as those interpretations exhibit modern strains of orientalism, they may reflect earlier versions of such prejudices in the images themselves.

Of course, John could hardly have anticipated being such a thorough test of critical bias, but when he came to the Council of Florence ready to trade the independence of the Eastern Church for aid against the Turks, he apparently did come dressed to impress.[4] Upon his disembarkation in Venice on February 8, 1439, a local artist devoted a detailed drawing to John's appearance, a careful study that suggests the Palaeologus stood out sartorially as well as diplomatically from the many other Eastern visitors to the city.[5] And the fascination with John's appearance only grew as he journeyed inland. The merchant Bartolomeo del Corazza observed that when the emperor entered Florence on February 29th, 1439, he was wearing "a white robe with a cloak of red cloth over it and a small white hat pointed at the front. On the top of this small white hat there was a ruby as large as a dove's egg, and other stones" (Sframeli 126). And the somewhat less materialistic Vespasiano da Bisticci noted that when the union of Churches was proclaimed on July 6th in Santa Maria del Fiore, the emperor was wearing "a hat in the Greek fashion with a very fine jewel on its top and was a handsome man with a beard in the Greek style."[6]

Vespasiano thus foregrounds the two features, the beard and the hat, that dominate the most famous visual records of John's appearance—Pisanello's sketch and medallion (fig. 1).[7] Though it is not clear where or precisely when these works were executed, it would seem on stylistic grounds that they were completed shortly after the artist saw the emperor, and there is little doubt that the medallion was influencing other works by as early as the 1440s.[8] Indeed, as one of the most widely disseminated images of the period, the medallion has long been a magnet for

commentary on Byzantine fashion and on the East in general.[9] In a letter of 1551, for example, the painter Paolo Giovio noted that Cosimo I possessed "a beautiful medal by Pisanello of John Palaeologus, Emperor of Constantinople, with that bizarre hat in the Greek fashion of the emperors."[10] Nor was Giovio the last to juxtapose praise for the aesthetics and workmanship of the medal with titillation at, or disdain for, the "exoticness" of its subject. In 1905, a curator of medals at the British Museum, G. F. Hill, noted the "oddity" of John's hat and the "curios[ity]" of his long curls amid the "considerable beauty and dignity" of Pisanello's portrait (107). In 1931, Babelon dwelt on the distinctiveness of John's outfit, particularly his "extravagant" hat, while waxing rhapsodic about Pisanello's style, technique, and originality (20). In 1966, by way of complimenting Pisanello's ability to capture John's "character," Weiss read the portrait through the lens of a pejorative stereotype for Asians: "The full mouth, with the slightly protruding upper lip covered by the mustache, suggests a mixture of cruelty and cunning. It is the mouth of a man that cannot be trusted, and this, together with the long and thin hooked nose and the small, almost slit, eyes, do not certainly reveal a very engaging personality" (18). And as late as 1983, De Lorenzi claimed that, in a departure from the "dignified reserve" of Pisanello's style and his "rejection of all trivialities," John's "headgear" is "exotic" and the appearance of his face "singular" (12). That is, with the sort of faint praise normally reserved for an unsuccessful blind date, she joins Weiss and the others in orientalizing the Palaeologus while extolling Pisanello's artistic ability; she participates in a critical tradition that stretches back to the mid-sixteenth century and that recalls the responses of at least some Italians who actually saw the emperor, including, perhaps, Pisanello himself.

Indeed, De Lorenzi's orientalism echoes the work of more than one quattrocento artist, for critical response to Benozzo Gozzoli's *Adoration* of approximately 1459, particularly to his figures of the magi, suggests Benozzo, too, exoticized the East (fig. 2). For example, though Luchinat ("The East Wall" 43) and Bernacchioni (39) have departed from other scholars who identify Benozzo's bearded magus as John (e.g., Mengin 370), they have noted the overtness with which the costume of that figure and those of the other two magi refer to the East, and they have suggested that this blatant exoticism may be a direct reference to the Council of

Florence. Moreover, Luchinat ("La Capella" 86) has joined Cardini (15-17) in claiming that the fresco may reflect Pius II's stay in Florence from April 25 to May 5 of 1459, for the pontiff was hosted during that visit by Cosimo de' Medici and was on his way to Mantua, where he was to call for a new crusade on behalf of John and the rest of Byzantium.

Since the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and largely in response to the Turks' subsequent spread into the Balkans, the popes had encouraged resistance to the invaders and promoted the idea of reclaiming the holy lands for the Roman Church.[11] They ran into opposition from the Medici and other local leaders, but they garnered enough general support that Cosimo may have felt obligated to back the idea at least nominally (Calvesi 42; Lagaisse 137). Moreover, he may have wished to remind his clients, guests, and allies that, in hosting the Palaeologus at the Council of Florence, he had played an important role at a time when opposition to the Ottomans and support for ecclesiastical union were perhaps more likely to have succeeded (Calvesi 42). Indeed, Calvesi has argued that the resemblance of the bearded magus to John is so precise and so deliberate as to be a direct declaration of Medici participation in the Council of Florence (33). Thus, even as Calvesi disagrees with Luchinat and Bernacchioni on the identity of the magus, he joins them in treating Cosimo as a prefiguration of modern proponents for globalization, as a forerunner of those who, though they may not promote foreign ventures perceived as economically or politically risky, nevertheless promote the expansion of international relations as a whole.

At the same time, other Italian scholars have interpreted the image of John, not to mention the rest of Benozzo's fresco, as a foreshadowing of modern social and artistic concerns. Contaldi, for example, ascribes a journalistic purpose to the frescoes, a somewhat twentieth-century interest in documenting the world around one (142-44). Rather than assign the forms and themes of the work to an agenda by Benozzo or by the Medici, Contaldi contends that the artist was merely recording that which he had seen in the streets of Florence during the Council of 1439. She treats the frescoes as a faithful reflection of a world she characterizes as so multicultural that an image of the Palaeologus riding through the Florentine countryside did not necessarily denote anything other than that very multiculturalism.

Other scholars, particularly those from France of the 1920s and 30s, agree that Benozzo to some degree depicts the world around him, but they do not always agree with the Italians on the character of that world, and they often ascribe the frescoes to Benozzo's particular perception of that world. In a 1924 study of "oriental" influences on Tuscan painting, Soulier claims the Eastern elements in Benozzo's frescoes are more pronounced and more realistic than those in many other quattrocento works, particularly Gentile da Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi* from 1423 (274-80). And ten years later Soulier's compatriot, Marcelle Lagaisse, classified Benozzo as an unabashed "orientalist" who exoticized the East in the course of recording its influence on Florence during the late 1450s (137-42). As Lagaisse notes at length and in detail—for he himself was not above exoticizing his subject—Benozzo captures the taste of a milieu in which it was highly fashionable to be seen walking a monkey on a leash and in which the very height of "bon ton" was to have a servant "nègre" (140). But, according to Lagaisse, such orientalism was only a passing fancy, for it quickly faded in Benozzo's art and in the culture around him (142-43). Indeed, Lagaisse suggests that Benozzo's orientalism was little more than an offshoot of the growing prosperity and concomitant trendiness among the Tuscan bourgeoisie, that his portrayal of appropriated animals, peoples, and ideas merely reflected the values of an archetype for the modern capitalist state (143-44).

Lagaisse therefore seems to have joined Soulier in bouncing their interpretations of Benozzo's work off perceptions of France during the inter-war years. Yet, though Lagaisse and Soulier's circumstances may have encouraged them to discern more blatant orientalism in Benozzo's frescoes than has been found by most other writers, they are not alone, as we have seen, in addressing the artist's Eastern references. In fact, those allusions have been discussed by so many critics from such a wide array of cultural contexts that the references would seem to be extraordinarily overt, to have been underscored by the artist. That is to say, contrary to Contaldi's contention, Benozzo himself seems to have exoticized, if not orientalized, the East.

The likelihood that this exoticization sprang at least in part from Benozzo's cultural context is reinforced by the critical response to Piero della Francesca's fresco cycle *The Legend of the True Cross*, which dates

from the late 1450s or early 1460s and is located just south of Florence, in Arezzo.[12] As early as 1883 Müntz noted (43) that Piero's figure of Constantine in the scene of that emperor's triumph over Maxentius (fig. 3) resembles the Palaeologus, an observation supported by Adolfo Venturi (7: 434-86) and Warburg (253-54) as they independently came to the same conclusion in 1911 and 1912, respectively. Subsequent identification of John with a lieutenant of Maxentius in a now destroyed portion of the *Triumph of Constantine* (fig. 4) has met with wider skepticism, as some scholars have objected that Piero would have been rather hypocritical to portray the Palaeologus as both Constantine and an officer of Constantine's archenemy (e.g., Calvesi 43). But Lavin has noted that Piero may have played on that very contradiction to generalize the political implications of the frescoes, for, by overtly acknowledging the slipperiness of likeness as signifier in this instance and in the use of John's likeness for Heraclius in the scene of that emperor's victory over Cosroes (fig. 5), Piero expands his commentary from those particular figures to their milieux, to the eras of Constantine and Heraclius as prefigurations of the artist's own time (*Place* 180).

In thus claiming a broad, transhistorical relevance for the frescoes, Lavin participates in a long tradition of response to the works, for Weisbach had attached general political implications to them as early as 1902 (56). And though most scholars who subsequently perceived political overtones in the frescoes narrowed the relevance of those implications to a particular issue or event during Piero's time, some did not go beyond the broadest of links between that issue or event and the frescoes. For example, in suggesting that Piero's cycle supported Pius II's proposed crusade, Venturi did little more than mention Constantine's resemblance to John (7: 440). Gutman noted in 1947 that the banners of Piero's Heraclius appear in other pro-papal works of the time (65), but, in claiming that the frescoes were "a flaming manifesto rousing the Christian world to the crusade ardently promoted by the Pope" (58), he built much of his case on impassioned rhetoric. And, in a highly influential 1951 study of Piero, Clark claimed the artist's support for a crusade rested to a great degree on the triumphal theme of the frescoes as a whole (38-39). Thus, by the time Lavin claimed in 1990 that John's image represented not so much the Palaeologus himself as the immediacy of Constantine's spirit,

she was complementing that historical continuity by invoking a long tradition of broad socio-political interpretations.

Of course, as noted by many scholars, such general associations do not preclude the possibility that Piero also imbued his figures and scenes with specific connotations. Calvesi notes, for instance, that the artist may have used John's features for Constantine to evoke the Palaeologus's heroic successor, Constantine XII, who never visited Italy and died during the taking of Constantinople (43). And Calvesi suggests (37) that Piero may have portrayed Constantine's victory and the battle between Heraclius and Cosroes specifically to recall Christian victories against Mohammed II, for the battles depicted at Arezzo are located by their primary source, Jacopo de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, on the banks of the Danube, on the same site at which the Turks were repelled in the summer of 1456.[13] Moreover, as Tanner notes, Piero lends the historical scenes an immediate relevance by painting the cityscape around Solomon's temple to resemble that of Arezzo (185-86). Thus, the likenesses of John and the contexts in which they are embedded may have specific connotations that reinforce the general implications of the opposition between those likenesses, that bolster the heroic portrayal of Constantine and Heraclius as forerunners of fifteenth-century opponents to the Turks.

Nor are Calvesi and Tanner alone in proposing that the likenesses of John have specific associations with opposition to the Muslims. Building on Warburg and Clark, numerous scholars have constructed elaborate cases that link those likenesses to Pius II's proposed crusade. Battisti, for example, claims Piero conflated not only Constantine with John but also Maxentius with Mohammed II in a bid to suggest that the resurrection of Byzantium was no less worthy of a crusade than were preceding efforts to reclaim the Holy Land from Moslem invaders (2: 23). Indeed, Gualdoni claims that Piero thereby makes his support for a new crusade "most evident" (8), and Lavin notes that, by conflating John and Constantine, Piero reinforces his case twice over, for he both invokes a historical precedent to fifteenth-century resistance against the Turks and lends an immediacy to Constantine's securing of Christianity (*Piero* [1992] text accompanying color plate 23; *Piero* [1994] 70).[14] Droandi (95) and Ginzburg (33) then extend those implications to Piero's very inclusion of Constantine, for they claim that in portraying the Roman emperor at all, in

thus departing from Agnolo Gaddi's late-fourteenth-century depiction of the *Legend of the True Cross* at Santa Croce in Florence and from Cenni di Francesco's early fifteenth-century depiction of it at San Francesco in Volterra, Piero invites associations between the establishment of Byzantium and the re-establishment of Christianity in the East. Similarly, Schneider suggests that, in another departure from Gaddi and Cenni, in depicting the meeting of Solomon and Sheba, Piero calls for unity between the Eastern and Western churches (27). Echoing Krautheimer and Krautheimer-Hess, whose monograph on Lorenzo Ghiberti discusses that artist's interpretation of the meeting on the east doors of the Florentine baptistery (180-87), Schneider notes that Sheba's visit to Solomon was often interpreted in the quattrocento as a prefiguration of the *Adoration of the Magi* and that the *Adoration* was perceived at that time as a symbol of the pagan world adopting Christianity (27). Hence, as Angelini subsequently articulated far more explicitly in 1985, many fifteenth-century Italians may have interpreted the meeting of Solomon and Sheba as a general call for union between the Western Church and so-called "non-believers," including Christians of other denominations, and may have interpreted it in the 1450s and early 1460s as a specific call for reconciliation between the Churches, as a first step towards a joint campaign against the Turks (32).

Like many other scholars, Angelini suggests that the crusading theme, particularly as manifested through Piero's likenesses of John, may have been encouraged by the artist's Franciscan overseers (22). The Legend had traditional associations with the Franciscans and had already been selected as the theme for fresco cycles in several other Franciscan churches (Ginzburg 28). Moreover, as Gualdoni has noted, the friars may have chosen the subjects of the frescoes, including the conflation of John and his imperial forebears, with the intention of establishing a visual counterpart to the devotion with which they wished to be identified, a faith that would extend to and embody the spirit of a crusade (7). And, as Lavin has suggested, the Order may have been promoting a crusade in hopes of re-establishing Franciscan control of holy sites in Jerusalem (*Place* 180; *Piero* [1992] text accompanying color plate 23). In fact, she has proposed that the friars encouraged Piero to depict the battle at the Milvian Bridge as a means of suggesting the contemporaneity of St. Francis and

establishing him as a prefiguration for the heroic defenders of Christianity in the East (*Place* 179-80; *Piero* [1992] text accompanying color plate 23). According to Lavin, the following three traditions apply to the image: Constantine had often been compared to Moses in saving his people from a pagan pharaoh and leading them to a promised land; the episode at the Milvian Bridge had been specifically associated since the fourth century with Moses's victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea; and Francis was himself known as the "New Moses" (*Place* 180; *Piero* [1992] text accompanying color plate 23). Thus, in referencing Moses, the image of Constantine would have also invoked Francis and associated the patron saint of the Order with two of the other most hallowed figures in Christian history.

One of Piero's other departures from the *Golden Legend*, the displacement of the Dream of Heraclius with the Dream of Constantine, has also been ascribed to the Franciscans, but it has been attributed to their desire to bring glory upon the Order through the celebration and perpetuation of their mission, rather than through the sanctification of their founder. According to Schneider, the friars may have requested the substitution in order to privilege Constantine and to underscore the divinity of his achievements (31). They would thus glorify by allusion their own history of defending the holy sites of Jerusalem and would simultaneously promote the opportunity to regain that role, for by portraying Constantine as having the divine vision that supposedly brought victory over Maxentius, the frescoes present the Eastern Church as a legitimate counterpart to the Western Church and suggest that unification of the Churches would be a return to, rather than a departure from, the spirit in which the Eastern Church was conceived. Moreover, in supporting that unification, the frescoes promote other opportunities for the Franciscans to fulfill the mission begun by Constantine, for in laying the groundwork for a crusade, as Battisti has noted (1: 196), the depiction of Constantine's dream, the conflation of Constantine with John, and Piero's other means of suggesting the compatibility of the Churches would presumably contribute to opportunities for the Franciscans to proselytize the many non-Christian inhabitants of the Holy Land. Thus, Piero's work would not only convey the central theme of a church dedicated to the Holy

Cross and epitomize the spirit in which the Franciscans evidently wished to be perceived but would also serve their more practical interests.

Indeed, the frescoes may even have served the political and professional interests of Piero's financial patrons, the Bacci. Though it is not entirely clear which members of this local family controlled which stages of the commission, it seems likely that Francesco Bacci hired the original artist for the project, Bicci di Lorenzo, during or shortly before 1447 and that, upon Bicci's death in 1453, Giovanni Bacci hired Piero and oversaw completion of his work.[15] Precisely what Giovanni's relationship was with Piero or what impact Giovanni had on the project can, of course, no longer be fully determined, particularly given the paucity of documents for the commission.[16] But, in the light of the magnitude and expense of the project, and given the known circumstances for other major commissions of the time, it seems likely that Giovanni or another member of the family would have insisted on the power at least to approve Piero's work.[17] And, if indeed the Bacci had that power, it seems highly probable that they would have encouraged Piero to promote a crusade if he were so inclined, for a crusade may have opened new markets for their goods and permitted them to bypass Venetian control of the Silk Road (Battisti 1: 196; Ginzburg 15). Moreover, as major supporters of the Ghibelline party (Battisti 1: 196; Tanner 185-88), the Bacci were heavily invested in promoting the supremacy of the Holy Roman Emperor and presumably would have favored not only the equation of his imperial predecessors with a recent defender of the East but also Piero's identification of the liberated Jerusalem with Arezzo (Tanner 185-86), which was then under control of the Guelphs in Florence, and his use of the Saracini family crest, the coat-of-arms for the leading Aretine Guelphs, on the banner of Constantine's enemy (Tanner 186-88).[18]

Of course, the Bacci may also have had loftier motives, or at least had advisors with loftier motives. As Ginzburg (34-40) and Gualdoni (7-8) have suggested, the family may have been connected with one of the most outspoken and esteemed proponents of resistance to the Turks—Cardinal Bessarion.[19] He had been a childhood friend of the Palaeologus, served in John's retinue at the Council of Florence, and spent much of his life promoting the salvation or resurrection of Byzantium (Ginzburg 34-40). In fact, though he praised the Palaeologus for his early efforts to fend off

the Turks, especially for seeking help from the West, he condemned John for not striving harder in his later years to defend Constantinople and particularly for not fighting harder to ratify Church unification (77). Bessarion maintained that only with the help of the West could Byzantium have been saved, and he insisted until his death in 1472 that the resurrection of the Eastern Empire was not only feasible with Western help but also in the best interests of the Roman Church (36, 56). Indeed, perhaps in part to promote his case within the Western Church, he accepted a cardinalship from the pope in 1439 and rapidly worked his way up the ecclesiastical hierarchy to being all but elected pope in the 1455 conclave (35). Thus, he would almost certainly have come in contact with Piero's primary patron, Giovanni Bacci, for the latter was a member of the papal administration, was related to the Vatican librarian Giovanni Tortelli, and knew many Aretine humanists who traveled in Bessarion's intellectual orbit (15, 35-40). That is to say, Bacci may have directly assimilated ideas from Bessarion and passed them on to Piero, or, having become intimately aware of the cardinal's position, may at least have directed Piero to please the powerful cardinal and to incorporate a pro-crusade theme in his frescoes.

At the same time, Bessarion himself may have directly influenced Piero, for Ginzburg has noted several circumstantial clues that the cardinal had the motive and opportunity for close involvement in the commission (35-39).[20] First, he was elected Protector of the Friars Minor in 1458 and thereby had a professional stake in the project. Second, the frescoes may have had a particularly personal relevance for him insofar as he possessed a Cross fragment that had descended from the family of the Palaeologus. And third, Piero's probable dependence on Pisanello's medallion for John's likeness may have been facilitated by Bessarion, for Giovio's description of Bessarion's impresa as the reverse to an apparently extinct version of the medallion suggests the cardinal was aware of the work and may have brought it to Piero's attention. Thus, Ginzburg joins Gualdoni, Lavin, Schneider, and Tanner in ascribing the theme and concomitant agenda(s) of the frescoes to Piero's advisors, in suggesting that these images were symptomatic of widespread resistance to the East and perhaps even fueled it.

Indeed, despite the fact that Ginzburg often portrays himself as an iconoclast and is frequently seen as such, his treatment of the frescoes participates in an enduring tradition of interpretations that echo long-term modern politics.[21] Though Warburg was perhaps the first scholar to link Piero's conflation of emperors with Pius II's call for a crusade, most of those who have discerned an anti-Turkish agenda in the frescoes have done so in the midst of the Cold War and its chilly aftermath. Beginning with Gutman's impassioned essay of 1947 and extending through Clark's seminal monograph of 1951 to the ostensibly revisionist studies by Ginzburg and his contemporaries, American and Western European scholars have invited an analogy between the Turks, as portrayed by Piero, and the Communists or former Communists of eastern Europe. Though these critics may not have intended such a parallel, they or the scholars on whom they base their interpretations seem to have been conditioned by political circumstances to perceive Piero as responding to a menace from the East. And, though they may not have declared that the Communists pose a threat to the West, they permit identification with Piero and his subjects in their resistance to the East. They allow that in much the same manner that fifteenth-century viewers may have seen in Piero's conflation of emperors a legacy of opposition to the "infidel" Moslems and other non-Christians, so modern viewers may see in those figures, as well as in Piero and his contemporaries, a model for resistance to the "godless" Communists of Bulgaria, Rumania, and other former satellites of the Soviet Union. Thus, the traditional orientalist perspectives articulated elsewhere by Lionello Venturi's 1954 description of Piero's "childish delight in luxurious, Oriental garments" (9-10) and Angelini's 1985 description of Piero's headdresses as embodying "exotic elegance" (32) are adapted to establishing a hierarchy of danger and alienation based on difference, to suggesting that John and other semi-exotic figures may warn about, and even serve as models for resistance against, those who are less Western in their culture and ideology.

Of course, as is implied by the departure of these post-World-War-Two responses from their pre-war counterparts, the perception of Eastern threats and warnings in the images may have no basis in the works themselves. But the similarity in political circumstances between Piero's time and that of the post-war interpreters suggests that the latter's

interpretations would be compatible with the general milieu in which the images were painted. And the wide range of cultural contexts from which the post-war critics came to similar conclusions suggests that the frescoes embody a viewpoint that is at least sympathetic to those interpretations. Moreover, the Arezzo cycle does not comprise the only works in Piero's oeuvre to have fostered such conclusions, for his *Flagellation* from approximately 1460 (fig. 6), particularly its possible likenesses of John, has attracted similar interpretations.

Though the *Flagellation* as a whole is so ambiguous that it may, as Pope-Hennessy claims (162), have engendered the largest bibliography of any quattrocento painting, many scholars agree that the seated figure on the left resembles the Palaeologus, for he wears the red socks of a Byzantine emperor and sports John's forked beard, long hair, pointed hat, and rugged profile.[22] Gouma-Peterson (220-33) and some other scholars have gone on to assume that the figure was meant to evoke John himself. But a few art historians have argued that John's likeness was just a convenient proxy for his brother Tommaso (e.g., Clark 34-35) or his successor Constantine XII (e.g., Pertusi 29-30), neither of whom had been to Italy by the time this panel was probably painted. And members of both camps have offered myriad explanations for why Byzantine leaders who were ostensibly perceived as heroic in 1450s Italy would be identified with a figure often believed to represent Pontius Pilate. Some scholars have suggested that it is merely further evidence for the slippage of such references and have questioned the intentionality, or at least the perceptibility of intentionality, behind those or any other appropriations of a likeness (e.g., Ginzburg 63). Others have argued that the resemblance is less a specific commentary on John or on other figures and more a broad allusion to political circumstances in Italy. In 1898, Witting became the first of many to propose that Pilate's resemblance to John was meant to invoke Pius II's call for a crusade (122-27). Ginzburg went on to specify that the panel was commissioned by Bessarion and by the Bacci for Federico da Montefeltro as a pictorial counterpart to Bessarion's condemnation of John for his apathy towards the Turks, as an attempt to stir a crusading spirit in the Duke (77). And Battisti discerned a crusading theme in Piero's use of a tiny cartoon for the turban of Christ's tormentors, in the artist's attempt to portray the Turks, and by extension their

"menace," as accurately as possible (1: 322, 326-27). Indeed, though Battisti claims damage to the panel has rendered precise identification of many figures nearly impossible, he argues that the work generally represents both an invitation from the "East" for its rescue from the Moslems and an agreement with an Italian duke for such an expedition (1: 325).

Other scholars, and, at times, Battisti and Ginzburg themselves, have argued that Pilate's resemblance to John is less a call for crusade than a recrimination. In such scenarios Christ is often interpreted as a representation of the Eastern empire or of Christianity in general, and the Palaeologus is condemned for not preventing the extinction of Byzantium. Gouma-Peterson, for example, suggests that the work as a whole, and the flagellation in particular, alludes to the suffering of the Church in the wake of John's failure fully to support ratification of Church unification (229). Ginzburg argues that, as the panel calls for a crusade, it rests in part on a cautionary tale condemning the Palaeologus for his failure to imitate fully Bessarion's enthusiasm for unification (77). Calvesi expands that condemnation to all those who remained neutral during the struggle against the Moslems, particularly to the Genoese colony of Pera (Galata), which did not help nearby Byzantium during the final Turkish siege (43). And Battisti treats Piero's panel as a general lament for the loss of the East (1: 321-23). Claiming that the figure of Pilate embodies Mohammed II in addition to resembling the Palaeologus, Battisti argues that it foreshadows the later engraving of John as Mohammed II by metaphorically depicting the sultan's capture of John's position (1: 322). Piero is thus credited with a remarkably contemporary interest in appropriation and a strikingly post-modern means of conveying that interest, with a complex displacement of references that corresponds to the traditional Italo-American treatment of him as epitomizing an era of extraordinary growth in intellect, innovation, and worldliness.[23]

In the eyes of many critics, moreover, Piero's prescient post-modernism is not confined to the background of this image, for they have also identified the three figures in the right foreground, particularly the bearded man, as metaphors for foreign individuals, institutions, or values. Some of those scholars have identified the figures as broad characterizations of the East or of other milieux that the East had come to

embody. Calvesi argues that they represent a general unification of East and West (41). Lavin claims in one of her many published studies of the work that the figures represent persons living in Jerusalem (*Piero* [1972] 62), while she claims elsewhere that the bearded man represents an astrologer ("Piero" 337-38).[24] Tolnay suggests that the figures embody a Jew, a Greek pagan, and a European heretic (20-21). Murray has proposed that they represent the Jews and the gentiles, the kings and the princes, and the clergy and laity, together with one angelic figure (179). Battisti claims the bearded figure depicts a generic Byzantine ambassador or other anonymous Eastern figure (1: 324-25). And Gouma-Peterson claims he is a Greek mediator between the East, as embodied in the seated figure of John-Pilate, and the West, as embodied in the passive figure at far right in the foreground (226-28).

Gouma-Peterson goes on to specify that the blond figure in the middle foreground is an allegorical "champion of virtue" exhorting the Greeks to relieve Christ's suffering by battling against the Turks (226-28). But, even with those details, her reading of the image is not as specific as are most other interpretations, especially those that orientalize one or more components of it. Some scholars suggest the figures represent groups or institutions in particular historical or biblical scenarios invoking the quattrocento belief that John and his contemporaries perpetuated the dress and customs of preceding cultures (e.g., Lavin, *Piero* [1994] 79; Borgo 549). Gilbert, for example, revised an earlier assessment of the three men as representing "the ever current bystanders" at public events in Renaissance pictures ("On Subject" 208-09) and claimed they represent the gentiles, soldiers, and Joseph of Arimathea during the Passion ("Piero" 41-51). And Bertelli has suggested that, while the flanking figures represent generic Greek and Latin functionaries of that empire, the central figure represents the man revived by the True Cross and symbolizes "a new pact with the Empire" (115-25).

Other scholars go beyond even those characterizations and assign particular identities to all three figures. Some of these interpretations ignore the beard on the figure at left and seem to overlook other possible echoes of Eastern customs and dress. Lavin suggested in 1992 that the left figure represents Ottaviano Ubaldini, the right figure represents Ludovico Gonzaga, and the center figure represents the idealized personification of

their lost sons (passim), though, as Gilbert points out, Ludovico did not lose a son ("Piero" 47). The author of a 1744 inventory, Dean Ubaldo Tesi, describes the three figures in the foreground as "Dukes Oddo Antonio, Federico and Guid'Ubaldo."[25] And Pichi agrees that the painting revolves around a portrait of Oddantonio (85-86). But he claims that, in an effort to depict the Duke as holier than he in fact was and thereby to counter his bad reputation, Piero portrays him as the idealized blond youth (85-86). Battisti confirms Pichi's interpretation on the basis of an unidentified "local legend" and a nearly contemporaneous copy of the painting (1: 324). But Guerrini claims that the central figure could not represent Oddantonio, for, during the period to which Guerrini assigns the painting, that is, during the late 1440s, the Duke would have been much younger than the blond figure appears to be (75-76). Nevertheless, Guerrini's observation did not keep him (75-76), Battisti (1: 318-28), and Siebenhüner (124) from defining the work as a dynastic statement for the dukes of Urbino. Nor did it keep Battisti (1: 318-28) and Siebenhüner (124) from linking it as a dynastic statement to anti-Turkish sentiment, from proposing that the presence of Federico da Montefeltro's predecessors at the Flagellation suggests the Duke supported the crusade and had the blessing of his family in doing so. Indeed, Battisti has conjectured that the panel was a funerary image designed to rehabilitate Oddantonio as the founder of a dynasty and as the *Vicario apostolico*, while linking Pius II's call for a crusade with Eugenius's pursuit of ecclesiastical union (1: 315). Formaggio agrees that the central figure represents Oddantonio, but, drawing in part on another "local legend," he interprets the flanking figures as Manfredo del Pio and Tommaso dell'Agnello, two advisors whose unpopular decrees provoked the rebellion of the Serafini and subsequently the assassination of Oddantonio (85). Thus, like Lavin and the other scholars named above, Formaggio ignores the Eastern clothes and beard of the figure to locate the scene and its program in the West.

Other critics, however, identify that figure as the Palaeologus or his brother Tommaso. Clark overlooks the similarity of the foreground figure to the seated man in the background and interprets the former as a learned Greek bearing "a certain resemblance" to John and possibly representing the emperor's brother (34). Calvesi adopts that position in noting that

John's brother may have been the greatest living advocate for a reconquest of Constantinople (41-42). Siebenhüner (124-25) and Lightbown (63) push beyond noting a mere resemblance of the figure to John and argue that the bearded man in fact represents the Palaeologus. And Ciardi Duprè Dal Poggetto supports that position, joining Siebenhüner, Calvesi, and Clark in suggesting that the figure is a commentary on the East ("La Flagellazione" 115-17).

But the emperors are neither the only such commentaries nor the only Eastern personalities to be identified with the men in the foreground. On two occasions Gombrich has proposed that the three figures embody the scene of Judas's repentance from Matthew 17:3-4 ("Review" 176-77; "Repentance" 172). Borgo argues that the three represent the Jews R. Joshua b. Perachiah, Marinus, and R. Judah, all of whom were refused entrance to the Pretorio to celebrate Easter (547-53). And Ginzburg claims the scene represents Giovanni Bacci dressed as a papal nuncio and bestowing the red scarf of a cardinal on Bessarion (75-76). Thus, the figure's clothing and beard seem to identify him as a particular representative of Byzantium or of one of the cultures from which it supposedly descends.

In the course of thus identifying the characteristics or personalities of the foreground figures as Eastern, Ginzburg does not explicitly orientalize them, but other scholars do. Lavin, for example, considers the bearded figure to be an astrologer owing in part to the "strangeness and distance" supposedly evoked by his beard, by an Eastern fashion that she equates with references to the apocryphal astrologer Dottore Barba Nera in modern Italian almanacs ("Piero" 337). And, though Gilbert emphatically rejects Lavin's hypothesis, he, too, treats the foreground figure's costume as exotic in its "odd[ness]" ("Piero" 49). Moreover, many other scholars who characterize one or more of the foreground figures as Eastern seem to echo the same Cold War agenda as do the post-World-War-Two interpretations of Piero's *Legend of the True Cross*, to estrange the figures as forerunners of a modern peril from the East. It hardly seems accidental, for example, that the bearded figure was first compared with the Palaeologus in 1951—just five years after Winston Churchill declared an "iron curtain" had descended upon Europe—by Clark, a member of the British upper aristocracy. Nor does it seem entirely coincidental that until

the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, many of the post-World-War-Two interpretations treated the bearded man as an important figure from the East and a rallying center for resistance to those perceived as oppressors in that region. That is to say, modern politics and modern international relations seem to have conditioned some scholars to perceive the foreground figures, particularly the one with the beard and "exotic" clothes, as a warning about cultures whose customs and ideology were even more alien than those associated with him.

That is not to say, however, that the interpretations of those scholars completely lack grounding in the *Flagellation* itself. Indeed, the extraordinary diversity of cultural contexts from which the critics came to similar conclusions implies that those interpretations are to some degree direct responses to the image. Moreover, the parallels of those conclusions to the post-war interpretations of the Arezzo frescoes suggest that both groups of responses are at least somewhat tied to a common contributor to the works, whether that be the artist or an advisor. And the similarity of post-World-War-Two international relations to those of Piero's time promotes the possibility that the artist, or his advisor, or both came to the works with the same general mindset as that of the post-war critics. Thus, by the very nature of their own biases, some of those critics suggest that the Arezzo frescoes were not the only works in which Piero deployed John's likeness from an orientalist perspective.

In return, Piero's works join those of Pisanello and Benozzo in exposing the prejudices of some modern critics, in demonstrating that orientalism endures among scholars of pre-modern Italy. Indeed, the *Flagellation* and Arezzo cycle contribute to an exceptionally clear warning of the potential bias in any interpretation, particularly in responses to milieux as historically distant yet culturally near as fifteenth-century Byzantium and quattrocento Italy. They encourage us not only to unearth other prejudices in pre-modern art and its modern historiography but also to be wary of our own biases, for only by keeping an eye on our own historical relativity can we hope to lift the veils of earlier interpretations, to appreciate fully that which they obfuscate yet indicate.

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Notes

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[1]For reproductions of Pisanello's drawing, Filarete's reliefs, the anonymous Tuscan bust, the Umbrian panel, and the engraving of Mohammed, as well as for numerous manuscript illustrations of John, see Weiss. For Pisanello's medallion of John, Benozzo's *Adoration*, and Piero's likenesses of John, see the illustrations below. Note that Pisanello's portrait of John was also repeated in Hartmann Schedel's *Liber Cronicarum* (fol. 256^{v}) for a portrait labeled "Mahumeth turchorum imperator." For more on that portrait, see Hill (111) and Weiss (27-28). Note also that pointed hats, such as the one ascribed to John, have been found on many other figures including the Queen of Sheba on the Dini cassone at South Kensington, and, according to Weiss (15), the Queen of the Amazons on an Italian fifteenth-century cassone at the Victoria and Albert Museum, an old man in a fresco by Giovanni Storlato in the church of Santa Giustina at Padua, and a bystander in an Italian fifteenth-century painting that depicts a tournament scene and is now in the civic museum at Tours. But, as noted by Lavin (*Piero* [1994] 70), there is a precedent for such peaked, conical hats in early-fourteenth-century Burgundian paintings and in other images predating John's visit to Italy, such as the head of Totila's Guard in Spinello Aretino's cycle of St. Benedict. See similar, though not identical, examples illustrated in Ciardi Duprè Dal Poggetto and Griffo, entry 22, particularly details from the temptation of a hermit in the *Triumph of Death* (c. 1327) at the Camposanto in Pisa, and a couple of the figures astride horses in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Effects of Good Government* (1338-39) from the Sienese palazzo pubblico.

[2]As Weiss notes, John's features were also considered appropriate for figures distant in time, particularly those from ancient empires (26-27). In

a circa 1446-54 Ferrarese copy of Plutarch's *Lives*, John's likeness is used for Lysander, Theseus, Phocion, and Lycurgus. In a manuscript containing the first five books of Polybius's *History* and dedicated to Pope Nicholas V (1447-55), there is an illuminated medallion of the author as John. And in a Ferrarese manuscript containing an Italian account of Charlemagne's deeds, there is a medallion of Charlemagne with John's features.

[3]For this transcription and translation of the inscription, see Hill (108). The inscription exactly corresponds to the official title of the emperor, as noted in De Lorenzi (11). On the confusion between the two subjects, see Hill (108) and Weiss (27).

[4]Note the empire was in such desperate straits that the Greek embassy went without funds for as long as five months, and some members of it were reduced to begging. For the most complete modern account of the Council, particularly John's visit to it, see Gill. For a good overview of Byzantine relations with the Turks, see Nicol.

[5]For reproductions of the image and the most thorough discussions of it, see Fasanelli (esp. 36-37) and Weiss (15). Also see Hill's note on the image (111).

[6]My translation of Vespasiano (16).

[7]As noted above, see Weiss for a reproduction of Pisanello's sketch.

[8]As noted by Hill (106) and others, Paolo Giovio claims in a letter to Vasari that Pisanello's medal was made "in Florence, at the time of the Council of Eugenius, where the aforesaid Emperor was present." But Giovio was discussing a medal that was not with him at the time and, in the same letter, describes a reverse that does not correspond to any of the three different reverses on the extant versions of Pisanello's medal. Consequently, other authors (e.g. Martinie 45) have proposed that Pisanello may have made the medallion after the Council or upon seeing the emperor travelling to Florence.

[9]On the dissemination and influence of Pisanello's medal, see Weiss (19-28).

[10]My translation of Giovio (209-10).

[11]For a good overview of the collapse and immediate aftermath of Byzantium, see Nicol.

[12]For a good, albeit somewhat dated, introduction to the extensive literature on the dating of the cycle, see Ginzburg (21-27).

[13]See also many recent general sources on the fresco cycle, such as Maetzke (33).

[14]Lavin extends that interpretation to other figures wearing dress associated with the Palaeologus, claiming that they all "visually allude to the living heir to the Roman empire in a scene of imperial battle" (*Place* 180-81). Note, however, that in *Piero* ([1992] text accompanying colorplate 23) and *Piero* ([1994] 70), Lavin mentions that several of Piero's other figures also wear clothing associated with the Palaeologus and concludes that those garments were not meant to "represent" the emperor himself but, rather, to invoke traditions affiliated with Byzantine dress of that time, particularly the fifteenth-century belief that Byzantine potentates wore the clothes of antiquity. Tanner notes that in late medieval histories the deposition of Cosroes and the restoration of Christian rule in the East at that time were often viewed as the first crusade (186). For more on this issue, see Alexander.

[15]The dating of the frescoes and the relationship of Bicci's contributions to those of Piero have engendered a great deal of debate. For perhaps the clearest history of that debate and for summaries of many arguments related to it, see Ginzburg (21-27), though note that he approaches the issue with a forceful agenda of his own.

[16]Thus, Gualdoni is overstating his case when he claims "it is certain" that the Bacci asked Piero to insert references to a crusade (8).

[17]For more on the role of the Bacci in general and Giovanni in particular, see Ginzburg (15-21, 28).

[18]Tanner notes that the reconquest of the Holy Land was believed to be the decreed destiny for the Holy Roman Emperor (185) and she observes that Tommaso di Baccio was a counselor for the Ghibellines in 1418; Giuliano, who commissioned the choir at Arezzo, was an affiliate of the party; and Giovanni, who commissioned Piero, served as a Ghibelline podestà of Milan in 1453 and as Ghibelline ambassador from Arezzo to Florence in 1460 (185). The personal political stake of the Bacci may be evidenced in Tanner's note that three generations of the Bacci are portrayed participating in the dethroning of Cosroes (188).

[19]For more on the patronage of the Bacci, see Salmi, Gilbert (Change 85-86), and Schneider (23-30).

[20]A relationship between Piero and Bessarion was perhaps first posited by Marinesco (193, 202-03).

[21]For evidence of Ginzburg's self-perception, see the prefaces to *The Enigma of Piero*, particularly such statements in the second preface as his impression that his original question "has been ignored or misunderstood by commentators on the book" (xxxi).

[22]Though Gouma-Peterson, Ginzburg, and many other scholars have recently noted the seated figure's resemblance to John, perhaps the first to do so was Babelon ([1930] 365-75). Note that on the basis of the dazzling light towards which the tied figure's head is turned and owing to echoes of an altarpiece from 1476 by Matteo di Giovanni, Pope-Hennessy interprets Piero's image as depicting not the flagellation of Christ but, rather, that of Jerome in a dream the saint recorded in a letter to Eustochium (162-65). Ginzburg counters that interpretation, however, by noting that other scholars have found references in the image to architecture that was believed in the fourteenth century to derive from Pilate's palace (116-17). On the red socks as an imperial emblem, see Gouma-Peterson (219).

[23]For a modern celebration of Piero that explicitly contrasts such celebrations with the relative disregard for Piero in the nineteenth century, see Clark (esp. 9-10).

[24]Lavin claims that the assumed role as astrologer for the model of the figure of Ottaviano Ubaldini reflects the possibility he had "perhaps his greatest fame" as such ("Piero" 337-38). However, as Gilbert points out in great detail, there are many historical and iconographical factors militating against such an identity, including the fact that an Eastern costume does not necessarily connote the wearer is an astrologer ("Piero" 46).

[25]Tesi's inventory of the Cathedral of Urbino addresses a painting in the sacristy and is translated in full by Ginzburg as "the Flagellation of Our Lord upon the column and, set apart, our most serene highnesses the Dukes Oddo Antonio, Federico and Guid'Ubaldo by Pietro Dall'Borgo" (48).

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Figure 1. Pisanello. *Medal of John VIII Palaeologus*. C. 1445. Louvre, Paris. Photo: Daniel Arnaudet. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

Figure 2. Benozzo Gozzoli. *Adoration of the Magi* (detail). C. 1459. Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence. Scala/Art Resource, NY.

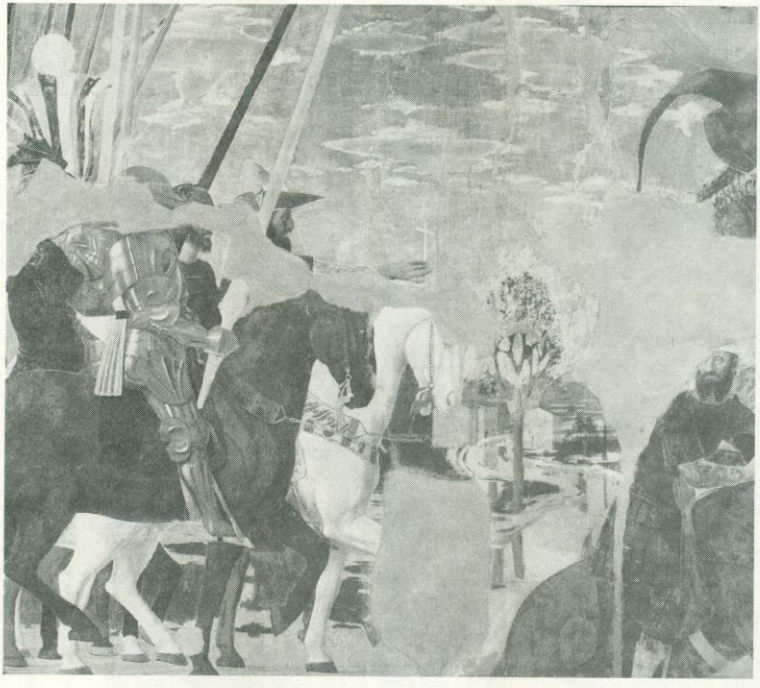

Figure 3. Piero della Francesca. *The Triumph of Constantine* (detail), from *The Legend of the True Cross*. 1450s-early 1460s. Santa Croce, Arezzo. Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Figure 4. Johann Anton Ramboux, after Piero della Francesca. *The Triumph of Constantine* (detail), from *The Legend of the True Cross*. 1450s-early 1460s. Santa Croce, Arezzo. Foto Marburg/Art Resource, NY.

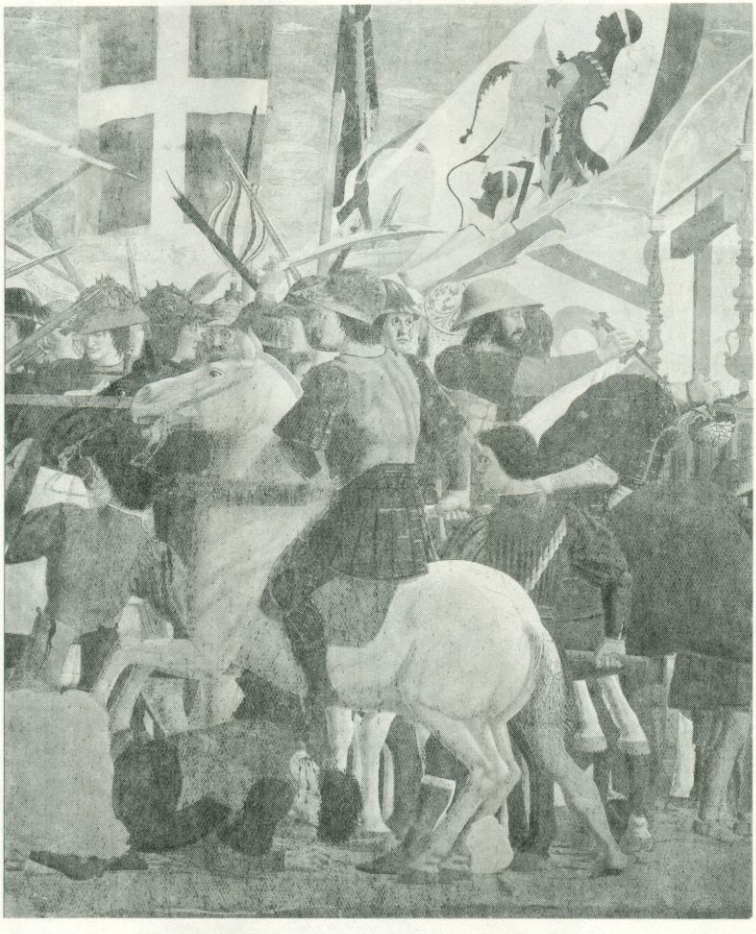

Figure 5. Piero della Francesca. *The Battle of Heraclius*, from *The Legend of the True Cross*. 1450s-early 1460s. Santa Croce, Arezzo. Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Figure 6. Piero della Francesca. *The Flagellation*. C. 1460. Ducal Palace, Urbino. Alinari/Art Resource, NY.